

Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work!

YOUR CHILD AND ANTIBIOTICS

About Antibiotics

Antibiotics are among the most powerful and important medicines known. When used properly they can save lives, but used improperly, they can actually harm your child. Antibiotics should not be used to treat viral infections.

Bacteria and viruses

Two main types of germs—bacteria and viruses—cause most infections. In fact, viruses cause most coughs and sore throats and all colds. Bacterial infections can be cured by antibiotics, but common viral infections never are. Your child recovers from these common viral infections when the illness has run its course.

Resistant bacteria

New strains of bacteria have become resistant to antibiotics. These bacteria are not killed by the antibiotic. Some of these resistant bacteria can be treated with more powerful medicines, which may need to be given by vein (IV) in the hospital, and a few are already untreatable. The more antibiotics are prescribed, the higher the chance that your child will be infected with resistant bacteria.

How bacteria become resistant

Each time we take antibiotics sensitive bacteria are killed, but resistant ones may be left to grow and multiply. Repeated use and improper use of antibiotics are some of the main causes of the increase in resistant bacteria. These resistant bacteria can also be spread to others in the family and community.

You can protect your child from resistant bacteria

Learn about the differences between bacterial and viral infections, and talk to your doctor about them. Understand that antibiotics should not be used for viral infections. Only five respiratory illnesses account for the majority (75%) of all childhood visits to a physician's office: ear infections, sinus infections, cough/bronchitis, sore throat and colds. Except for ear infections and an occasional "strep throat" almost all these illnesses are caused by viruses.

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What can I do to protect my child from antibiotic-resistant bacteria?

Use antibiotics **only** when your doctor has determined that they might be effective. Antibiotics will not cure most colds, coughs, sore throats or runny noses.

If mucus from the nose changes from clear to yellow or green, does this mean that my child needs an antibiotic?

Yellow or green mucus does not mean that your child has a bacterial infection. It is normal for the mucus to get thick and change color during a viral cold. A bacterial sinus infection in a child is very rare.

Does this mean I should never give my child antibiotics?

Antibiotics are very powerful medicines, and should only be used to treat bacterial infections. If an antibiotic is prescribed, make sure your child takes the entire course. Never save antibiotics for later use and never share your child's antibiotics with someone else.

How do I know if my child has a viral or bacterial infection?

Ask your child's doctor. If you think that your child might need treatment, you should contact your doctor. But remember colds are caused by viruses and should not be treated with antibiotics.